

PRIVATE VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATIONS:

THE PARTICIPATION PARADOX

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ABSTRACT

"Participation" is a term that is bandied about by all the actors in the international development field -- donors, Private Voluntary Organizations, and recipients alike. Each group has a different understanding of the concept of participation and values it for different reasons.

Interviews with staff members of six Private Voluntary Organizations (PVOs) and three prominent donor organizations, reveal an apparent contradiction. When questioned about the meaning and importance of participation, respondents initially reacted cynically, almost dismissing participation on the grounds that the word has been so overused it had become meaningless. Despite this response, all the interviewees confirmed their organizations supported and promoted beneficiary participation in their development projects.

This seeming contradiction is attributed to: each organization's different and changeable definition of participation in line with the organization's objectives over time; the donor-PVO relationship; the influence of host governments; the trend where participation rises and falls in popularity, and the problems of implementing participatory approaches in the field.

The study concludes by highlighting the implications of the ambiguous definition of participation and the resultant impact on the practices of PVOs and on the involvement of beneficiaries. First, the fuzzy meaning of participation can be functional -- PVOs can couch participation in terms that donors will respond invariably to, even though the activities practiced by the PVO may differ from what the donor expects. Second, due to this ambiguity of interpretation, PVOs and (other organizations) can often claim to be participatory when indeed they are not. The fact that participation is seldom an overt theme in project evaluation also permits groups to get away with their claims, and still attract funding. Third, while donors encourage PVOs to become more participatory to ensure project success, strict donor methodological and administrative requirements can inhibit the participatory methods of PVOs. Finally, because implementing participation is so difficult, PVOs not rigorous in their interpretation and practice of participation, may support projects that could actually strengthen existing inequalities and discourage the desired social change.

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ACRONYMS

ACCION	Accion Aitec
ACVFS	American Council of Voluntary Agencies for Foreign Service
AFSC	American Friend Services Committee
AID	United States Agency for International Development
Bank	World Bank
CBI	Caribbean Basin Initiative
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
CWS	Catholic World Services
CP	Community Participation
IAF	Inter-American Foundation
IBRD	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development
IDA	International Development Association
IPVO	Indigenous PVO
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NPO	Non-Profit Organization
MCC	Mennonite Central Committee
MIT	Massachusetts of Technology
NASPAA	National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration
OA	Oxfam America
PACT	Private Agencies Collaborating Together
PADF	Pan American Development Fund
PEM	Minimum Employment Program (Chile)
PF	Pathfinder Fund
PL 480	Public Law 480 - U.S. Surplus Food program
PVC/FFP	Private and Voluntary Cooperation/Food for Peace
SPAT	Special Projects Assistance Team (Dominica)
SDAWS	Seventh-Day Adventist World Service
WB	World Bank
WEI	World Education Inc.

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I. INTRODUCTION.

When I began this study I wanted to investigate how a buzz word, "participation", came to be so in vogue, bandied about by the full range of actors in the development field -- donors, Private Voluntary Organizations, and recipients. Why was it so important, and did the rhetoric match up to reality?

Donors consider participation valuable because it is isolated as a factor contributing to the success of development projects, as well as a means to mobilize greater resources and accomplish more with the same project budget (Finsterbusch and Van Wicklin, 1986). Some Private Voluntary Organizations (PVOs) support participation because it ensures that the community's identified needs are met, thus giving beneficiaries a sense of commitment and responsibility to the projects. Other PVOs promote participation because it draws on indigenous knowledge, and prevents the inappropriate application of western devised solutions. Beneficiaries, given the opportunity, obviously strive for their own participation in order to get the maximum benefit from international assistance.

There is, however, opposition to participation. Some claim that using existing patterns of local power and organization can reinforce existing inequities rather than stimulate desired system change (Kolavale, 1982 cited in Finsterbusch and Van Wicklin, 1986). PVOs and donors often find that participation is difficult to implement. Dealing with a large community instead of one or two leaders is time-consuming. Participation can be complicated when local governments think beneficiary involvement may be subversive and threatening to the power structure. Despite these

problems donors, PVOs and host country recipients still support the ideal of participation.

Participation of beneficiaries in development projects is an issue that has interested me since I worked on a self-help housing project several years ago. I believe in the ideal of participation where beneficiaries are involved in deciding on their futures. Granted, it is possible for project participants to benefit from the results of a any project. But only if the beneficiaries are actively involved in decisions affecting their own lives, can they develop as individuals or communities, and hence become independent and self sufficient. I decided to investigate the complexities and contradictions of "participation" as perceived by the organizations and groups closely concerned with development in the Third World.

An Apparent Contradiction?

A striking paradox emerged almost from the start of my interviews with staff members at different Private Voluntary Organizations (PVOs). People reacted cynically to my questions about the meaning and importance of participation to their PVO. I heard a surprising range of responses from:

"Oh! It's just fashionable to say you are 'into' participation, that way you can be sure your projects will be approved," to

"Participation as a word is meaningless; it's used to justify different kinds of development activity -- everything from grassroots to strengthening elites, to supporting counter revolutionaries," and

"Well, some think participation is irrelevant for projects, but we need the participation of the locals to build the rural carrier roads."

Some thought the term "participation" should "be given a holiday" -- over-

use had caused it to lose any real meaning. Still others suggested different words, such as "empowerment" or "control," to describe their concept of participation. A few respondents were enthusiastic about the importance of participation and thought it vital to the beliefs of the organization. But what struck me was that this group was surprisingly in the minority.

Yet, despite this inauspicious beginning to my questioning, all the respondents could still explain what they meant by participation, and its importance to their organization. Herein lies the paradox. I could extract rich descriptions of participatory projects or programs even though a) many of those interviewed thought participation as a word was over-used and had become meaningless, b) I found little agreement in the way people defined participation, and c) it appeared that the meaning of participation and hence the implications for beneficiaries had changed over time. I was particularly struck, that even within the same organization, people had limited consensus regarding the meaning and relevance of participation.

How could this complex paradox exist? While PVOs cynically dismiss the term "participation" as meaningless and over-used, almost every person interviewed supported the value of participation as an integral part of the functioning of the organization, and/or as a goal of the PVOs' work. Despite the sarcastic commentary on participation, they still pursue participatory processes in one form or another. Often PVOs rely on the participation of beneficiaries to ensure that projects meet the defined needs of a community and that projects are successfully adopted and implemented.

A deeper aspect of the contradiction is that the PVOs support

participatory approaches, even though some are skeptical of the validity and applicability of participation in all situations. Even though most PVOs believe that beneficiaries should participate in decision making and activities associated with the stages in a development project, experience shows that participation works better in some situations than in others.

To explain this apparent contradiction I needed to explore further the roots of this cynicism over the meaning of participation and the skepticism about its validity, and see how the PVOs cope with this dilemma in their daily functioning.

II. THE STUDY

Focus of the Study: Why PVOs?

I focus my attention on Private Voluntary Organizations (PVOs), because they, out of all the organizations involved in international development, have the particular reputation of being participatory. PVOs are non-governmental (private), tax-exempt, non-profit agencies engaged in overseas provision of services for relief and development purposes. They derive at least a portion of their funds from private, charitable contributions (Gorman, 1984:2). Some are secular, others are associated with religious groups. Some provide technical assistance in specialized areas like business management or livestock, while others help communities to express their needs and organize to meet them (Tendler, 1992:1).

PVOs are part of a select group of organizations which have their heads in Washington or New York, and their feet in Indonesia or Peru. PVOs are crucial in the development field: they form a link between the donors (governmental and private) in the United States, and the

beneficiaries in the Third World. Many PVOs receive funding from United States government agencies, and thus are obliged to take the donors' preferences and requirements into account. The role of government agencies is to fulfill the objectives of Congress. These objectives are not always attuned to the goals and modes of operation of the PVOs -- a situation which may cause conflict and dissatisfaction to the U.S. government, PVOs, and those on the receiving end of aid.

In the host countries, PVOs need to be sensitive to the political dynamics of the host governments, as well as to the needs of the project participants. PVOs tread the slippery path between fulfilling the requirements of the donors, as well the priorities of the poor in Third World countries, while remaining true to their own ideals.

Using PVOs as my unit of analysis, I gained valuable insight into the complex interactions between donors, PVOs and the host countries. The paradox of participation is exemplary in reflecting the impact of these interactions on the operations of PVOs, and the projects and programs they support.

Gathering Evidence

For comparative purposes I studied six PVOs displaying a broad spectrum of characteristics. These include: Oxfam America, World Education Inc., Pathfinder Fund, ACCION AITEC, Save the Children Federation, and the Pan American Development Fund. (See Table 1) I limited my scope of investigation to secular organizations. The case studies embody a range of specializations: family planning, non-formal education, microenterprise, agroindustry, and community consciousness raising. Four of the PVOs receive a large proportion of their funding (80

- 90%) from the U.S. Agency for International Development (AID), another receives funding from AID indirectly through their clients, and one is independent relying only on private donations. Two PVOs have their origins overseas, (World Education Inc. in India, and Oxfam America in the United Kingdom), the remainder were founded in the United States. Their budgets vary in scale from \$38.7 to \$1.0 million.

Table 1. Characteristics of PVOs in the Sample.

Name of PVO	Characteristic	Specialization	Funding Source (% govt \$)*
Oxfam America (OA)	institution and network building	self-help develop- ment projects, disaster relief, public education	private donations, (0.0%)
World Education Inc. (WEI)	technical assistance	literacy, non-formal education, management and skills training	private donations, foundations, AID (. %)
Pathfinder Fund (PF)	technical assistance	family planning, women's projects	private donations, foundations, AID (83.7%)
ACCION AITEC (ACCION)	technical assistance	credit and manage- ment training for micro enterprise	private donations, foundations, corporations, public agencies (55.7% indirectly)
Save the Children Federation (SCF)	institution and network building	development projects, infrastructure, services	private donations, AID (20.6%)
Pan American Development Fund (PADF)	technical assistance	microbusiness, agriculture, relief, vocational training, reforestation.	private donations, AID (21.4%)

* 1982 figures based on Smith, 1983
Includes all funding from U.S. government agencies.

In addition to the interviews of staff persons at the PVOs, I spoke to people at three donor agencies, namely the U.S. Agency for International Development (AID), the World Bank and the Inter-American Foundation (IAF). (See Table 2.) AID is the largest single source of funding for U.S. PVOs, and hence plays an influential role in the development field. The World Bank indirectly supports the activities of some PVOs -- its primary relationship with the Third World is on an inter-governmental level, negotiating and providing loans. The IAF funds indigenous PVOs (IPVOs). This organization is of particular interest to me as its mandate is a) to support efforts at self-help, b) to promote wider and more effective participation, and c) to encourage the growth of democratic institutions (Meehan, 1979).

I interviewed people in different positions within the two groups of organizations -- from high level policy makers to field representatives. In each case I tried to find a person who had spent some time in the field, and was known to have an interest in participation. To verify the findings from the interviews, I delved into the organizations' official literature, and in many cases procured access to project files.

Finally, to broaden my perspective on participation and international aid agencies I spoke to political scientists, anthropologists, economists and other academics, at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Harvard and Johns Hopkins. In all, I personally conducted 33 interviews over a period of two months. (See Appendix 1.)

Table 2. Characteristics of Donor Organizations in the Sample.

Name of Donor	Characteristic	Type of Funding for PVOs
U.S Agency for International Development (AID)	U.S. government agency fulfilling the goals of Congress, fostering economic development in the Third World	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Operational Program Grants for field projects- Matching Grants - PVOs have to pay 50%- Institution Building Grants to strengthen PVOs' operational and managerial capacity
World Bank (WB)	Multilateral development institution, which lends funds to governments, provides economic advice and catalyzes investment by others	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- No direct loans or grants are given to PVOs. The WB lends money to governments or public agencies, and PVOs are often the implementing organizations. PVOs are growing in importance for WB activities
Inter-American Foundation (IAF)	Funded by Congress but independent of U.S foreign policy. Focus on Latin Am. and the Caribbean - promotes equitable, responsive and participatory approaches to development	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Outright grants to indigenous PVOs. IAF does not fund U.S. PVOs at all.

Ideally, I would have spoken to beneficiaries, PVOs and local government representatives in the host countries to get a first hand look at the impact of the development projects, and see for myself how the participation rhetoric translates into reality. Unfortunately this was not possible. Thus the study focusses on the United States perspective of the international relationship. This paper lays the groundwork for future field research.

III. EXPLAINING THE CONTRADICTION: ROOTS OF THE CYNICISM

Exploring the roots of the cynicism formed the starting point of my study. Although some degree of cynicism is not unexpected in an organizations such as a PVO (or any other for that matter) I found that the causes of the contradiction have serious implications for the participation of beneficiaries, and how the PVOs operate. In this section, I first identify and group the different definitions the organizations have of participation, and suggest reasons for these alternative views.

Not only does the word "participation" mean different things to different organizations, but interpretations shifted over time. This prompted a concomitant change in the nature of participation of beneficiaries, depending upon the development strategy employed by the PVO. I discovered that the PVO-donor relationship is responsible for much of the participation paradox. I next examine the donors' interpretations of participation, and how the complex interactions between donors and PVOs directly affect the work of PVOs and beneficiaries' participation in development.

Finally, I look at the implications of the waves of "fashion" which participation undergoes, and investigate how it is possible for organizations to get away with rhetoric. Throughout this section, the key question I keep in mind is what is the impact of this cynicism (and its root causes) on the participation of beneficiaries in development projects, and on the activities of PVOs. This question is, in essence, a central issue in the study, and one which is import for the integrity and reputation of PVOs.

1. The Semantics Shuffle

To understand why participation has "lost meaning" I first needed to look at how the different organizations define participation.

Participation is a chameleon-like concept -- each organization attaches a different meaning (or range of meanings) to the word, depending on the circumstances. I specifically chose the following definitions and accompanying examples to highlight the fact that various meanings of participation have different implications for the involvement of beneficiaries.

The United Nations sees participation as the mass sharing of the benefits of development, mass contribution to the development effort, and decision-making in development (United Nations, 1975). This definition is so vague and could describe almost any development activity -- from improved health as a result of an immunization program, to the maintenance of irrigation channels, from the women in the community deciding on the location of a well, to the creation of an agricultural cooperative.

To provide a framework for the reader, I group the interpretations of participation into three conceptual categories:

- a) as a tool to ensure project support and implementation,
- b) in terms of the short term objective of sharing of the benefits of the project, and
- c) a long term goal in its own right.

None of these concepts are necessarily exclusive.

Consider the following definitions of participation, and some actual examples of the dimensions of the concept. World Education Inc. (WEI) sees participation to be the PVO's equal collaboration with organizations,

either local governments or non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the participation of recipients in decision making. The following example illustrates the nature of beneficiary participation implied by the definition. In a poor province of Thailand, WEI worked on a development project with a local village development council. The village comprises two distinct communities: the rice/rubber growers and fishermen and their families.

The PVO set up workshops with the councils and together they designed an innovative mechanism to allow illiterate villagers define and prioritize their own needs, rather, than as often happens in a traditional bureaucratic, top-down approach where officials or village leaders decide on behalf of the community. Villagers were given paper bags in which the WEI team asked them to place an item that represented a problem the village needed to resolve. The most striking response from this experiment came from a village elder who returned with a forked stick. He used it to symbolize the village -- once a sturdy tree, now representing two conflicting factions.

WEI expected the villagers to collect items representing failed crops or resource scarcities. However, this participatory approach revealed the tension between the powerful community of rice/rubber growers and the poorer fishing community. The groups sat together and discussed the needs of both communities and of the village as a whole. Instead, the village decided to target the needs of the poorer fishing community, who thus received proportionately more benefits than the farming elites.

WEI used participation as a tool in the process of project development, as well as a means of ensuring that resources were equitably distributed. WEI maintains that if it were not for the participatory

approach used in identifying and prioritizing needs, the benefits would have accrued to the powerful farmers -- a situation which more often than not occurs when development efforts follow a top-down approach.

WEI does not necessarily fall into the third group of categories -- community participation and consciousness raising as a primary goal of development. Community empowerment or the community control over resources and decision making constitutes a fundamental assumption in Oxfam America's (OA) basic philosophy. OA envisages participation as a process in which a group or groups exercise initiative in taking action, stimulated by their own thinking and decision-making, and over which they have specific controls (Feuerstein, 1978).

OA currently supports a participatory research and training project in a tobacco, coffee, and cotton region of Nicaragua. The explicit goal of the project is to increase the involvement of the women in a union of landless farmworkers. The union has a separate women's committee, and study centre. This committee initiated the project with the aim of equalizing the balance of power in the union, after it identified a problem with the women's participation in union activities and meetings. Campesinas (rural women) belonging to the union were democratically elected from the farms to interview women on 64 plantations. For eight days on each plantation, the researchers worked side-by-side with the women farm workers. During this time, the union women initiated discussions centered around the problems and needs of the campesinas. The issues identified by the women themselves will form the basis of training materials for the community representatives.

In this case, the women directly participated in identifying their own needs. This will increase their power in the union, and the women are

expected to have more say in the overall decision making within the union. OA considers participation to be an outcome of its work, not merely a means to ensure that a project is completed. The mobilization and organization of the community is as important as the result of the project.

The U.S. Agency for International Development (AID), a primary sources of funding for PVOs, sees participation as the sharing of the benefits of economic development. AID funds large scale development activities through host country governments. AID also channels funding via PVOs for smaller scale social and technical projects. Participation is different in both of these contexts. In the large scale development projects, beneficiary participation is not necessarily a priority for AID, as the interaction is at the ministry level and the primary beneficiaries are the public agencies or organizations receiving funding. Where PVOs receive funding from AID, participation usually takes the form the PVO advocates, as long as this does not interfere or conflict with the goals of AID.

What accounts for these different meanings? I suggest the various definitions of participation can often be attributed to the particular specialization of the organization. WEI is an organization specializing in educational programs for youth and adults. In their adult, non-formal education programs, training offered emphasizes ways to help adults define their own needs, think and plan for themselves, and take action to improve their lives and those of their families and communities (Reports, 1980). Thus WEI essentially considers participation a modus operandi as well as a tool to implement a program.

OA for instance does not promote only one specific type of

development activity, but rather supports intermediary organizations involved in a variety of projects as identified by the beneficiaries themselves. These projects range from farming cooperatives to income generating projects, from irrigation schemes to farm-to-market distribution projects. The types of activities supported enhance the self-sustainability of the participants. Hence, "participation" or "empowerment", as OA likes to term it, is an overriding development goal guiding the selection and support of projects.

The U.S. Agency for International Development (AID) by contrast aims to promote the economic development of the Third World countries, and therefore pays attention to the distribution of the benefits of that development.

Participation is a conveniently flexible concept, which I suggest allows it to garner support all along the political spectrum. Those on the right see it as an opportunity for the farmer or small businessman to pull himself up by his boot straps. Those on the left view participation as means of promoting the empowerment of the masses and ensuring equality in development.

It is no wonder that the PVOs are evasive about their interpretations of participation. They each interpret the word in terms of their own specializations and terms of reference. Tasks and priorities differ from PVO to PVO, and from donor to donor, and are all conditioned by the political and economic context. The word is easily adapted to cover a range of complex development issues without true clarity.

2. Temporal changes, temporary meanings

The conceptual understanding of participation as a tool, a goal, and the sharing of benefits can be found in most spheres, yet over time the actual word "participation" has been used to describe different activities depending upon the strategy used by the PVO or donor. Does this mean that the nature of participation is so amorphous and undefined that it fits any action in any context? Or is it because the idea of participation is supported by so many factions that, whatever the circumstances, some degree of participation is discernible?

In the fifties and sixties the community development movement influenced the meaning of participation. This was particularly widely adopted in India, along with as many as sixty nations which felt its influence. The movement identified individual deficiencies as the cause of poverty: therefore the thrust of attention was paid to the need to change personal attitudes in order to stimulate participation. "The core of the community development movement and method is to help the people help themselves improve the material and non-material conditions of their lives because the assumption is that there, in the long run lies the salvation of the community." (Bryant and White, 1983:207) The community development model was abandoned by the mid- sixties, due to its uneven performance, the ease with which benefits were skewed to the wealthier, and conflicts with existing bureaucratic agencies (Korten cited in Bryant and White, 1983).

Participation was subsequently associated with the administrative process. "Participation had a notable counter insurgency quality about it," and was seen as alternative to revolutionary movements (Cohen and Uphoff, 1978). This was based on the notion that if people could be

mobilized to be part of the development process, they would be less available to revolution (Bryant and White, 1982). This is a theme I return to in analyzing the donor-PVO relationship.

PVOs have used various strategies for assisting the poor in developing countries. Korten (1985) identifies three groups of approaches which roughly approximate an evolution from one strategy to the next. The strategies are i) relief oriented in response to disaster situations, followed by ii) future oriented development approach with the main focus on development projects. Currently a theme that is emerging is iii) the support of local organizations to ensure sustainability of projects, communities and institutions.

These strategies very roughly approximate the following time sequence: the relief oriented approach dominated PVO activities from post World War Two until the late sixties/early seventies; the small development project strategy became the main thrust of development efforts from the early seventies and is still very important; the building of local capacity and sustainability orientation first gained support in the early eighties and grows in emphasis today.

The importance of the temporal changes in the meaning of participation is that, over time, different strategies adopted by PVO imply a different type or degree of participation which has an impact on the role of the beneficiaries. In each case I show how each strategy incorporates participation.

(i) In the relief oriented approach, participation is seen as equal access to the resources made available by the aid agencies. CARE is well known for the provision of CARE packages to devastated communities after

the Second World War. Oxfam America played an important role in rushing food and grain to starving villagers in successive sub-Saharan famines. An important issue in the allocation of the aid was that no groups would be discriminated against, and that all the refugees received a share.

(ii) In the second stage of the evolution, PVOs turned their attention to the alleviation of poverty, not simply in providing resources, but rather through creating the conditions where the poor could increase their own capacity to meet their own needs with their own resources. This strategy was a reaction to a concern of the potential for creating dependency, and that relief efforts did not contribute to the long-term needs of the starving and homeless.

This future-oriented development approach requires the participation of beneficiaries in a different capacity than simply as receptacles of food and clothing. The approach takes the form of small development projects aimed at improving local services, housing or agriculture with the idea of promoting local self-reliance. Ideally, beneficiaries participate in the projects in the initiation, design, implementation, and evaluation stages. PVOs act as catalysts, stimulating beneficiaries to identify their own needs and assist them in working out suitable solutions to problems. This switch to a development approach was also prompted by the fact that the new project-oriented strategy made PVOs eligible for new kinds of public and private funds (Bolling and Smith, 1982).

Along with this transition to development strategies, relief assistance is no longer purely the provision of food and housing, but increasingly considers the long-term development of the people as important as the provision of necessary supplies. In a Catholic Relief Services (CRS) funded refugee project in Honduras, instead of simply

providing the refugees with emergency rations, the PVO devised an approach which allowed the refugees to set their own priorities and to allocate the resources themselves. CRS organized workshops for the refugees to identify needs and set priorities.

The beneficiaries received raw materials, rather than finished products, to give the refugees the means to provide for their future needs as well as current demands. Groups formed to turn leather into shoes, cloth into clothing and bedding, and nylon thread into hammocks. Refugees had access to seeds and tools, along with technical advice. After some months the refugees provided half their vegetable needs. With this developmental strategy, beneficiaries play an active role in needs identification and decision making, a role that was not initially considered in the relief-oriented approach.

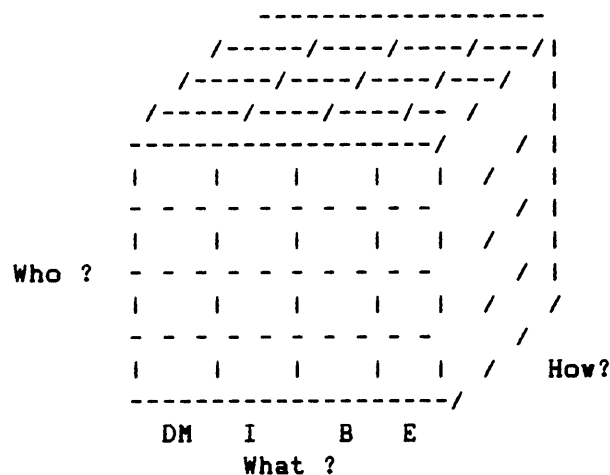
This change in the nature of the participation of the people came after a growing realization that the provision of food and housing created a situation of dependency. PVOs needed to create the conditions whereby the poor could increase their own capacity to meet their own needs with their own resources. In other words the participation of the poor was often a necessary input for development. PVOs, aid agencies and academics outlined elaborate models of the participation of beneficiaries in the various stages of the life of development projects: from initiation, to design, implementation and more recently, evaluation. In other words, different types of participation are explicitly identified at various points in the development cycle.

Cohen and Uphoff (1977) identify the dimensions of participation in development projects in terms of the following questions:

- a) what kind of participation -- in decision making, implementation, in benefits and in evaluation;

- b) whose participation -- local residents, local leaders, government personnel, and foreign personnel;
- c) how is participation occurring within the project -- considering where initiative comes from, inducements, individual or collective structure, duration, scope, range of activities, and degree of empowerment.

Participation is seen as having three dimensions, represented by the three dimensions of the cube. These in turn are broken into the subcomponents outlined above. If one were to blacken the boxes of the cube, according to the circumstances of a specific project, a profile of the participatory nature of that project would result.



DM = decision making I= implementation
 B= benefits E = evaluation

(Source: Cohen and Uphoff, 1977)

(iii) In the final group of strategies, participation takes on yet another dimension -- institution building. Attention is paid to the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and local organizations, with the intention of bolstering their management and administrative capacities, so that they have the skills to development independently. In other words

the primary beneficiaries are no longer the poor, but are the local agencies or non-governmental organizations. The PVOs do not form the direct connection between the American donors and the poor in the Third World; another link in the chain is introduced.

The focus turns to the needs of the local institutions, and the participation of the villagers becomes the responsibility of the indigenous PVOs or other local groups. The choice of intermediary organizations therefore becomes crucial to protect the needs of the poor. This requires PVOs spend time in the field screening and assessing potential local PVOs or NGOs to be sure of their participatory and management claims to warrant funding and support. This selection is as difficult for PVOs as it is for large donors, and often the most vocal and popular intermediaries are funded, even though their participation track record may be less than perfect. Therefore, because the interpretation of participation is ambiguous, PVOs may become sloppy, and make less than satisfactory selection of participants. PVOs are essentially taking on the characteristics of the larger donors, which implies that different management and organizational strategies are required which may not be conducive to the participation of the beneficiaries.

It is improbable that this institution building strategy will be the predominant approach used by PVOs. The results of institution and network building are less tangible than development projects which are visible and demonstrable evidence of donor support. PVOs, and other aid agencies, therefore, are unlikely to relinquish their emphasis on this direct and appealing approach.

Over time therefore, participation took on different meanings: equitable distribution of relief aid, the involvement of beneficiaries in

the different stages of the project development cycle, and the support of intermediary organizations. The cynicism creeps in when participation is used to explain all types of development activity regardless of the degree of participation of the beneficiaries. It is unclear which particular activity or relationship participation is used to describe. The meaning has shifted, along with the different approaches the PVOs used over time, and this had a direct impact on the nature and degree of participation of beneficiaries.

How did the PVOs justify different interpretations of participation over time? Were they compromising or adapting their understanding and belief in participation to suit the changing circumstances? I will address these questions in the final section.

3. Donor Aid: Manipulation or Support?

PVOs are placed in the often precarious position of mediating or creating the link between the donors, be they government or private, and the host countries. They form a filter for a two-way flow of political and economic interactions. Though they see themselves as catalysts of development, PVOs are directly affected and changed by the reactions and relationships they induce. In addition to playing this intermediary role PVOs, must ensure their own survival as organizations, while striving to remain true to their principles and ideals.

How private are PVOs?

I discovered that the source of the cynicism and ambiguity is related to the forces buffeting the PVOs. PVOs are obliged to answer to the demands of the donors, as the PVOs are dependent on the donors who provide the financial support for the PVOs' existence. They also have to respond to the needs and wishes of the poor and the governments in Third World countries. These relationships do not exist in a vacuum, but are governed by the political and economic forces that shape the operational context of donors and recipients alike and, hence that of the PVOs'.

Most Private Voluntary Organizations are not, as the name suggests, really private. For AID to register a PVO as a private non-profit organization, merely 15 to 20 percent of their funding has to come from private sources (AID, 1983). What does this mean then for AID-funded PVOs? I suggest CARE, which receives approximately 75% of its funding from government sources, is essentially a development agent of the U.S. government fulfilling the goals of Congress. Whereas others may think it

is a PVO working towards achieving its own goal of providing relief in disaster situations. There are very few sources of funding for PVOs, and for some, who struggle to survive, AID support is often the only viable alternative.

The donors hold the purse strings and hence determine the sphere and type of operation of PVOs. Yet, though the donor agency has the financial capital, it is not a normal banking arrangement -- the money is packaged in the form of long term grants and is seldom in the form of loans. Once the money is distributed to the PVOs, the donor has little control over its actual use. Thus donors seek to gain as much control as possible in the planning stages. Simultaneously, recipients try to push as many of the details into the implementation stage where they in turn have greater leverage in negotiating details (Strachan, 1978 cited in Gran, 1983). AID therefore plays an instrumental role in the functioning of those PVOs, especially over the past two decades (and currently) during which time donations from private sources have decreased substantially.

For example, in response to the Reagan Administration's anti-abortion stance, the Pathfinder Fund (PF) a PVO specializing in family planning, no longer supports abortion programs, even though PF funded these activities exclusively through private sources. At the review of the organization's five year funding plan, AID forced PF to give up its abortion activities. To emphasize its point, AID only renewed PF's funding for two years, with an extension conditionally based on PF's success at cutting its abortion support. Recently AID also indicated that the intermediary organizations associated with PF, may not provide abortion services -- neither in the referral of patients, nor in direct provision.

These conditions set by the U.S. government, via AID, restricts the

PVO's functions, yet if PF did not agree to the requirements, it would have to significantly scale down its activities. These AID requirements have serious implications for the participation of PF's clients. First, the range of services offered to the beneficiaries is restricted. A PF staffperson mentioned she is concerned that the women enrolled in the family planning programs may be done a disservice because their options are limited, should they decide a certain birth control method does not suit their needs. Second, by not offering abortion and related services, the clinics effectively exclude certain groups from participating in the program should the women, at the very least, request referrals.

PVOs (regardless of specialization) claim, and have subsequently gained, a reputation for reaching the poor and promoting participatory processes, for flexibility and innovation, and for a people-to-people working style (Tendler, 1982). Partly for these reasons, AID channels funding through PVOs. One of the questions I asked AID and PVO staff members was whether the conditions and requirements which accompanied the funding, ultimately negated these very reasons why AID supposedly funded the PVOs. Was flexibility reduced for instance, or were some PVO forced to operate in a centralized manner via donor approved leaders, rather than a community oriented approach?

Surprisingly, within AID's office of Private and Voluntary Cooperation (PVC), Bureau for Food for Peace and Voluntary Assistance which administers the funding of PVOs, responses differed:

"Never! We essentially buy into the proposals that the PVOs make, or else we wouldn't fund them in the first place."

Contrasting this account was the reply of another person in the same department. She thought it might be possible for AID to inhibit the

functioning of PVOs, and cited the case where a PVO used a centralized approach, instead of the people-to-people advocated by the PVO.

As part of the grant renewal process, PVOs must submit project evaluations to the Office of PVC, in a particular format, within strict time limits. The PVO did not have time to conduct the evaluation in a way which encouraged feedback from the participants, and resorted to a top-down approach in order to get the evaluation submitted on time to get the grant approved.

Here, the requirements of AID forced the PVO to compromise itself -- the beneficiaries were not actively included in the evaluation stage of the project. This prevented the PVO from having a clear picture of the impact of the project. The evaluation process only served to mechanically fulfill the requirements of the AID grant making process, and provided little useful information as to the impact of the project on the lives of the beneficiaries, and the success of the project in meeting the objectives of the community and the PVO.

However, even though it was not necessary, the PVO had the integrity to return to AID, explain the situation and ask for additional time and funding to conduct a more appropriate evaluation focussing on beneficiary involvement. The second evaluation, in contrast to the initial evaluation, revealed the dynamics of the project and highlighted which groups received benefits to the detriment of others, a situation which the PVO sought to remedy. The first evaluation, may have laid the groundwork for the subsequent evaluation, but the PVO needed to follow the initial report up with an evaluation which included beneficiary feedback in the assessment. (This kind of evaluation where participant feedback is ensured, should be distinguished from the "participatory evaluation"

methodology advocated by Oxfam America for instance. Participatory evaluations are generally initiated and conducted by the participants themselves, for their own assessment and use. Beneficiaries identify areas of concern either on their own or with the assistance of an outside facilitator, and use the findings to improve the ongoing effectiveness of the project.)

Weiss (1983) notes that when evaluations are conducted for reasons other than for providing information for the organization implementing a particular project, the results of the evaluation will seldom be used, or will not provide the information required to improve the functioning and impact of the project.

As I anticipated, PVOs reacted affirmatively to my hypothesis that AID requirements might restrict the activities of PVOs and negate the alleged comparative advantage of PVOs. WEI felt its flexibility would be impaired by AID's insistence that the intermediaries with which WEI is associated in Kenya should be registered with AID. For the Kenyan non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to register with AID, a formal application is required which entails the inspection of accounting records and management practices. This would take quite some time, and could make the african organizations wary of potential U.S. interference in their internal affairs. Also, many Kenyan (NGOs) could not stand up to this scrutiny; thus AID would not register the intermediaries. Hence WEI would be restricted from working with these groups.

The PF definitely feels the strain of donor policies intruding on its activities. AID currently supports a natural family planning approach, and requires that PF puts five percent the funding of every project aside

for this activity. Separate time sheets document this, even though PF does not consider this birth control method as a top priority in their range of services offered. To fulfil the requirements specified by AID, the PVO must include a natural family planning component in all projects.

Smith cites the example of the Catholic Relief Services (CRS) in Chile in 1975. CRS participated in the Minimum Employment Program (PEM) of the Chilean government, by contributing food packages destined for workers, in partial payment for their labour in public works projects. The unions thought this program highly exploitative of the workers, in that the labourers were not even paid the minimum wage. In addition, the program used the workers for productive (not merely marginal jobs) and hence replaced many full-time public employees. Chileans perceived the PEM program as a manipulative instrument of the government against the populace.

CRS participated in PEM for three years for mainly political reasons -- pressure on AID from the Chilean government, lead to AID officials in New York, persuading CRS to contribute some PL 480 food to the project. The Catholic Church's local affiliate in Chile, Caritas, acted as the local intermediary, which raised the ire of many who thought the Catholic Church was furthering the junta's exploitative policies. CRS withdrew from this project in 1978, not for moral or political reasons in response to local opposition, but because AID no longer considered Chile as a priority area for its Food for Peace program and thus reduced its PL 480 programs in that country (Smith, 1984). To its credit, PEM did reach the poorest communities, but the cost and conditions associated with their participation in the program, only served to maintain and indeed reinforce the unequal political relations in the country. The PVOs are pulled by

the needs and wishes of the donors, and often appear to compromise their values and integrity, to ensure their own survival as organizations.

Unrevealed intentions

It would be naive to imagine that PVOs are funded merely because of their self-proclaimed advantages in the development field. Donors obviously have their own objectives in mind, when selecting organizations to fund. These objectives could be political, strategic, or a way of putting pressure on host governments. In fact several studies show that the so-called comparative advantages that PVOs assert they have, do not really exist. (Kramer, 1981; Tendler, 1982; DAI, 1979; R. Nathan Associates Inc., 1982) For instance, these studies revealed that PVOs are not as cost effective as claimed -- the small scale of the projects make them inexpensive, but per unit costs can be very high. PVOs interviewed, felt some of the conclusions of the evaluations were a little harsh; they still believe in their ability to reach the poorest groups, using innovative approaches.

AID commissioned three of these studies, and is thus presumably aware of the fallibility of PVOs. Yet despite these findings, AID continues to fund PVOs -- obviously there must be some other reasons for doing so. PVOs noted that different pots of money become available for different geographical regions, and then fade from view depending upon U.S. foreign relations at a particular point in time. At present there is a significant amount of funding available for the Caribbean region, due in part to the Caribbean Basin Initiative (CBI) monies. CBI aims to provide duty free access to commodities, as well as bilateral aid and military assistance. However, instead of improving the economic situation of the

Caribbean islands, Jamaica in particular, has worsened despite the additional funding available for development agencies. The primary impact in the region has been the build up of arms -- a Dominican I spoke to noted there are weapons on the island never seen before. The strategic implications of the funding, therefore cannot be understated.

The Mexican government permitted Save the Children Federation (SCF), which receives approximately 25% of its funding from U.S. governmental sources, to assist in relief and development efforts after the recent earthquake, while U.S offers of aid were turned down because of the negative implications of an association with the U.S. government. AID can therefore indirectly fund projects and organizations in countries where the host government may not be predisposed towards accepting U.S. assistance, or where an American presence would not be tolerated.

James, in her study of Sri Lankan NGOs, identifies several reasons why governments indirectly support local organizations or community groups via intermediating Western PVOs. Her findings support the Mexican example:

Foreigners may "trust" donations coming from NPOs (PVOs) as having fewer political strings attached, while direct government donations may be regarded as tainted and therefore less effective at winning friends; .. this procedure enables foreign governments to avoid the red tape and bureaucracy often encountered in direct governmental transactions, as well as the outright restrictions in dealing with politically sensitive areas. (James, 1982:114)

The PVOs are cynical about the ulterior motives behind donor funding, because they realise that they are not funded necessarily for their participatory approaches to development, but rather for their strategic value. PVOs face a dilemma here. They do not want to be linked with AID,

because it limits their flexibility. Yet many PVOs could not survive without AID support. This sets up a tension between the PVOs, between allowing them to fulfill their goals, and coping with a context of funding that is politically and strategically motivated. They have to rationalize their actions and at some level feel committed to and comfortable with their projects and the impact on the communities.

Participation Platitudes.

PVOs are cynical because organizations -- donors, PVOs and recipients -- use "participation" to justify activities that are far from participatory. A Guatemalan engineer, for example, told of a municipal authority that touted a housing project as highly participatory: people built the units communally and spent a significant portion of their weekends and "free" time on the project. On closer inspection, however, the participation of the group was "encouraged" by the presence of the militia who stood guard over the labours of the community to ensure timely project completion.

An NGO in Tanzania was extremely proud of a participatory animal husbandry project. The group transported goats to a particular village to improve the strain of offspring of the whole community's herd. Over time, the herds of all the villagers showed signs of strengthening. The village leaders claimed the project was participatory because all the villagers benefited from the improved strain introduced into the herd. In reality the goats remained in the village leaders' possession, and the villagers were obliged to rent the services of the rams. The leaders made some profit on the side, instead of making the goats freely available to the whole community. (Seidman, et al., 1985)

In the above examples, the projects did nevertheless provide some benefits to the groups -- housing and stronger livestock -- but the projects were not participatory in terms of decision making and control by the villagers. Participation is used to describe situations which are not truly participatory, yet often those in authority get away with claiming participation, and thus improve or maintain the good image of the organization.

The Tanzanian goat project raises an issue that is key for PVOs, and exposes a problem associated with the implementation and politics of participation. Often PVOs work with the existing leadership, instead of seeking out the ultimate beneficiaries directly. First, leaders are more vocal, visible, and hence more accessible. Second, it may be necessary to gain the leaders' support before the rest of the community is willing to participate. Or third, it may be impossible to work with community members, without the input of the leadership, because of the power the leaders exert on the villagers. However, working with the existing leadership, while appearing participatory, may in fact only serve to reinforce and strengthen the traditional community structure, and could quash any true grassroots participation from opposition or minority groups. Even where the leadership may be counter to the traditional power structure, such as a progressive priest, the same pattern emerges where the leader may be threatened by small grassroots groups and will discourage their participation in development projects or programs.

Thus even in the situations where the PVO or intermediary group promote participation with the best of intentions, instead of encouraging villagers in the project in a participatory manner, the project only serves to reinforce existing inequalities rather than stimulate the

desired social change. This is not to say that all projects led by the existing leadership will result in exploitation and inequality, but that it is an important aspect to take into consideration when implementing a project.

Mutual manipulation

AID is by no means the only party culpable of massaging the meaning of participation. An AID official who works with PVOs in Latin America observed "the recipients learn to manipulate the donors -- if the donors' 'bag' is participation, you can be sure participation will appear in the project."

WEI's submission of a proposal to AID for funding of a participatory non-formal education project illustrates this point. During the grant application process, the Reagan administration came into power, participation was no longer in vogue and the development emphasis changed to privatization and building community capacity to ensure project sustainability. Staff members rewrote the proposal in terms that stressed the creation of capacity of groups to ensure sustainable development projects. The participatory methods of the project remained the same, with the inclusion of small income generating grants.

AID responded that it was not interested in providing welfare in the form of grants, and that WEI should persuade the recipients to set up a revolving loan fund with commercial rates. What was originally conceived as a participatory non-formal education program with an income generating adjunct was transformed into a revolving loan fund. The non-formal education side of the project proceeded as originally planned. In other

words participation was reinterpreted by WEI in terms which were acceptable to current AID policy. The PVO still thought of participation as an essential part of the project, and simply restated the meaning of participation in terms which appealed to the donors. The rewriting of the proposal, in terms which suited the donors, did not impact or alter WEI's approach to participation. The staff did not change its way of thinking to suit the new directives from the donors: the donor requirements did not influence how the organization thought about and practiced participation. Because the definition of participation is so fuzzy and malleable, the PVO was able to retain its initial participatory method, all the while convincing the donors the "new" project fitted the changed objectives.

WEI sensed they would not receive any funding if the project remained unchanged, and took advantage of the opportunity. It overcame a potentially inhibiting hurdle, and ensured future funding for the organization. WEI rationalized this action on the basis that there is so little funding available, it is better to have some financial support, even if it is for a specified purpose, as part of the funding could be used to support administrative and resource needs for other activities as well.

WEI and the local intermediary organization were skilful in attracting AID funding under seemingly adverse conditions, but this changing of plans mid-stream had implications for the operations of the local organization. The church group had no experience in controlling a loan fund, and ran into administration difficulties. This required extra attention and assistance from WEI, which it was hard pressed to give. This did not hamper the participation of the community in the education

program as originally conceived, but might have inhibited their ability to participate in the revolving loan fund.

PVOs are cynical because they are aware of AID's underlying motivations, which may not necessarily coincide with the goals and objectives the PVOs wish to accomplish. Resource-poor PVOs are therefore put in the position where they have to "use" or manipulate the donor funding system, and the flexible understanding of participation, to be able to engage in the participatory pursuits in which the PVOs and beneficiaries believe.

Following Funding

It is not always possible for PVOs to fulfill their goal of participation -- donor requirements could oblige PVOs to change the nature of participation of the beneficiaries. PVO staff members expressed some distaste at having to follow the funds rather than following their own priorities. "If agriculture is being emphasized, then it is somehow incorporated into the proposal," commented one field officer.

In the late seventies and early eighties, for example the emphasis was on Women in Development. This prompted a series of targeted women's projects in, for example, income generation and skills training. This coincided with the U.N. Decade for Women. Many private foundations and government agencies set aside funding for projects that specifically focussed on the needs of women.

For instance, the bishops of the Archdiocese of Mombasa South, Kenya, supported by WEI, learned that money was available for women's projects. Even this was not the usual type of project the church group supported, it applied for the grant with the idea of using the funding to bolster their

other development projects. The organization successfully secured the funding, but ran into problems early on. The leaders had not thought how to link the women's project resource requirements to their other activities, and found they were diverting a substantial part of their efforts away from their priority areas, instead of bolstering them. The women's project also replicated other activities in the region. The project, therefore, was in a way a misallocation of resources, induced and tempted by the availability of the resources. In the long run however, the group learned much about their organizational needs and management shortcomings.

The participation of beneficiaries is, therefore, governed by the funding available for specific projects, and not by what best suits the beneficiaries' needs. PVOs alter the nature of participation in response to the type of funding available. If donors are emphasizing primary health care or micro enterprise projects, then the range of projects that beneficiaries can choose from is limited, and hence participation is limited.

Again PVOs are faced with the dilemma of having to answer to the demands of the donors, because they need the funding for organizational survival, and thus cannot permit themselves the unattainable luxury of allowing themselves to pursue their goals. As shown in the Kenyan example, going after funding which is constrained by specific conditions, can backfire, and can place more institutional strain on the PVO than is warranted by the donor requirements.

In some cases, the PVOs adapted themselves to the program interests, priorities, and operating procedures defined by the government. However, PVOs are also concerned that in subtle or overt ways, they may shift their

priorities against their principles or better judgement. (Bolling and Smith, 1982)

Positive Spinoffs

Another factor contributing to the cynicism is that despite the highly critical descriptions of the donor-PVO relationship, this relationship is not always negative and is also obviously beneficial for the PVO. First, the PVO receives the funds to support their activities. Second, the donors are often valuable sources of information on technical and other matters. PVOs often improve their operating methods through the insistence and inducement of the donor. Donor requirements regarding operations and management procedures are usually imposed with the best of intentions.

The logical frame matrix is an example of how AID tried to induce PVOs to improve their planning and evaluation procedures. This requirement had some positive impact on certain PVOs in that it prompted them to look carefully and upgrade their management and organizational practices. Other PVOs were less than satisfied with this requirement. The logframe consists of a one-page report, divided into sixteen boxes, addressing questions relating to: 1) broader program goals, 2) specific project objectives intended to meet those goals, 3) project outputs, 4) inputs for achieving the desired results, 5) objectively verifiable indicators by which one could demonstrate whether the first four categories were being met, 6) a listing of the means of verification as to how one would measure the achievements, and 7) listings of important assumptions behind each heading of goals, purposes, outputs, and inputs.

The idea was for the organizations to reflect on their methods and resource requirements (Sommer, 1977).

This evaluation method elicited three distinct reactions from PVOs generally not attune to such a systematic approach to development. The first group of PVOs reacted positively -- it found the logframe useful in forcing it to think more clearly about their projects and management approaches. The second group, already resentful of AID's conditional funding resisted making further funding dependent on the adoption of the logframe process. The PVOs objected to AID's approach of trying to fit them into a standard mold. The last group filled in the boxes to satisfy AID's requirements, without significantly changing their program strategies in practice.

A Seventh-Day Adventist World Service (SDAWS) logframe evaluation of a community health and nutrition program, in Honduras is an example of how the evaluation methodology had a positive impact on the management and planning practices of the PVO. The evaluation revealed that community health promoters needed further training to improve their effectiveness. The group also needed to improve the reporting system of the promoters to the clinics. The report revealed an inadequacy in the monitoring of the PVO. SDAWS incorporated these findings into their future projects.

This example epitomises the dilemmas raised by the donor-PVO relationship. Some PVOs found the regimen useful as it forced them to improve their planning practices. While other PVOs resented the presence of the donor, but could not completely ignore the requirements, unless they were prepared to take the risk of losing AID funding and support. Another group of PVOs saw the logframe as yet "another hoop to jump through" in the AID-PVO power struggle. All were dissatisfied with the

AID influence, yet in some cases there were tangible positive spinoffs from the AID-PVO relationship.

Thus PVOs are often torn between receiving the benefits from the donors in the form of funding and technical assistance, and in return have to comply with the stringent requirements of the donors. This sets up a tension in the PVO, on the one hand needing the funding for the survival of the organization, and on the other feeling compromised regarding flexibility and ability to fulfill the PVO's goals.

Does Independence Decrease Cynicism?

The conflicts of interest described above, have caused some PVOs to stay away from government funding. These organizations see their role as demonstrating strategies and projects for replication by larger development organizations. Oxfam America (OA) and the religious Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), for example, decided to remain independent of AID so that they could choose the activities and geographic locations they wanted. OA, which is solely supported by private donations, "neither seeks or accepts U.S. government assistance," (OA Facts For Action), is convinced it was able to move rapidly as it did in the Kampuchean crisis because it was not associated with, nor financially dependent, on the U.S. government.

This independence permits the PVOs to gain credibility both at home (from their private contributors) and abroad (from local organizations and host governments). The freedom from U.S. funding also allows OA to fund more radical and grassroots organizations, which otherwise might not see the light of day. This finding was also noted by James (1982) in her analysis of indigenous PVOs (IPVOs).

The Small Projects Assistance Team (SPAT), a local development agency in Dominica, has a policy of not accepting funding from any governmental sources, neither in Dominica, nor from abroad. In addition, it also screens funding from foreign PVOs, and only considers support from organizations that have a similar ideological approach to development as SPAT. SPAT maintains that despite the Dominican government's suspicion of the organization as a political front, it has offset this opinion somewhat, and gained much credibility by not accepting governmental funding, and by taking their non-partisan stance.

In Sri Lanka projects benefiting the Tamil minority are supported by OA in areas where this group is persecuted. OA commits to promoting the participation of minority groups, and because of their independence, can exercise that option. CARE or Save the Children Federation (SCF), which are primarily funded by AID, cannot exercise such risky options, which could anger or alienate their donors. SCF and CARE can fund the politically more mainstream Sri Lankan PVO, Sarvodaya, which in reality fits the PVOs' selection criteria more closely. SCF and CARE are more concerned with improving the lives of a large sector of the community, rather than focusing more narrowly on smaller groups. OA also funds Sarvodaya, but makes a point of funding organizations on both sides of the political fence.

Thus the donor-PVO relationship engenders situations and linkages which create the circumstances for ambiguity, and often distrust. Each actor has a different use for participation which could create a misunderstanding between what is meant by what is said, and between what is said and what is done.

4. Host Governments and Beneficiaries

PVOs are also pulled by the wishes and demands of the host country governments and obviously by the beneficiaries. This can have both positive and negative impacts on the projects and on the PVOs themselves. Participation is always a delicate issue in countries governed by repressive regimes (where it is often considered subversive or revolutionary) or even in socialist countries (where participation follows mandatory or structured paths).

When Oxfam America worked on an irrigation project in socialist Kampuchea, the host government essentially pushed OA into the role of simply providing technical assistance. The PVO recognized that the participation of the villagers had to be left to the discretion of the government. Participation in this situation was merely the notification of the village committees regarding the irrigation scheme, with no options regarding choice of location or maintenance procedures. Because the villagers were excluded from the initial decision making associated with the scheme, they had little understanding of the implications of the project. The villagers let their cattle graze on the embankments, resulting in damaging erosion and the less than perfect operating of the sluices and channels.

OA staff members maintain that if villagers had participated in the project from the beginning, the beneficiaries would have been more supportive of the maintenance of the scheme, and the channels and sluices the scheme would have been correctly and more efficiently utilized. Implementing of participation, difficult even under favourable conditions, is especially complicated when host governments have a different agenda

from the PVO, and may obstruct the operations of the PVO. In this sense the operations of PVOs are restricted by local conditions, as well as by the PVOs' domestic situation.

Paying attention to the needs of beneficiaries is one of the prime motivations for promoting participation. An indigenous PVO in Dominica, SPAT's approach is based entirely on promoting the participation of its beneficiaries. SPAT team members work with villagers every step of the way from project initiation to evaluation, using innovative awareness and consciousness raising techniques to involve the members of the coops or crafts groups. SPAT works in tandem with a group called Movement for Cultural Awareness, using approaches such as popular theatre and role playing to raise critical issues. The director of SPAT attributed the increased level of women's participation in a work group to SPAT's participatory techniques. Apart from being more vocal in meetings and events, over a period of two years, the women began to think about their situation more analytically. The solutions they devised were innovative, and drew on their own resources. This participatory approach was possible because SPAT did not have a predetermined idea in mind, as to what the group should be doing, and supported and advised its clients accordingly.

Tototo Home Industries, an NGO supported by WEI, was working with a group of women who decided that they needed day care facilities, because they were not able to spend sufficient time with their children. The WEI and Tototo team determined the women were spending all their time collecting and processing grain, whereas what was really needed was a grain storage facility. This would allow the women to stockpile their grain, instead of having to work on a fulltime basis, and neglecting their children. Despite this alternative view, WEI assisted the women in

building and staffing the day care centre, as it was the solution that the women themselves felt was most suitable. The hope was that over time, WEI and Tototo would be able to make the women see the need for grain storage themselves, once the immediate problem was alleviated. The PVO showed great restraint in not putting its ideas forward. However, this is a situation which may not necessarily occur.

Often PVOs or donors may already have a solution in mind, and participation is elicited to get support for a project. In this situation, participation is actually "consultation" (Hollnsteiner, 1976), where beneficiaries are only given the option to choose between alternatives, and are excluded from decision making. This is not to say that these types of projects would not benefit the participants, but it is unlikely the specific needs of the beneficiaries would be met. For example, the Pan American Development Fund (PADF) works on the principle of prodding the consciences of the wealthier private sector in developing countries. PADF has a predetermined idea of how to approach these groups, how to form them into management boards, and what type of activities will be supported. There is very little leeway for the administrative boards, or for the informal sector workers, for example, who try to get loans and technical advice from these groups. In other words, PADF defined the problem as the need for private sector leaders to help the poorer communities, while the poorer communities may not even want to work with, or feel indebted to the more powerful private sector.

In some situations, participation can actually prevent projects from getting off the ground. In the United States, community opposition to highway construction led to bridges and roads being halted midway. I asked respondents whether participation had ever caused a project to flounder.

An IAF supported cooperative in Montevideo, experienced organizational and managerial problems, because the day care and community gardens project the women in the group decided to implement was very complex. The group was fragile, the project ran into difficulties, and the project was terminated. All was not lost however, the youths in the community started babysitting services under the supervision of the women. This case shows two important outcomes of participation. The frustration and instability of the group, when confronted with the ambitious projects it tried to implement led to the disbanding of the women's group. Yet there were positive spinoffs from the organizing base the group formed, and another activity spun off from the community's initial participation. Participation has the potential for both positive and negative outcomes, it can stymie or cause a project to falter, either through opposition to a proposal or through inappropriate selection of tasks and management structures. On the other hand, community participation could stimulate other unanticipated and beneficial community activities.

PVOs, therefore, have to pay attention to the needs and demands of the donors, host countries, and most importantly to the beneficiaries. Each group places different constraints and offers different opportunities for the implementation and effectiveness of participation, which results in varying degrees of project success and beneficiary satisfaction.

5. The Fashion Factor.

Development projects in the Third World often do not achieve the purposes for which they are intended, and are criticized for their disappointing results. One reason for these failures which found its way

into conventional wisdom is that beneficiaries are not involved in initiating decision making regarding development projects that affect their lives and future, and hence the projects did not suit the needs of the beneficiaries. In the mid-seventies several studies concluded that participation contributed to the success of rural agricultural development projects. For example, Uma Lele in a study of African rural development projects found that "participation in planning and implementation of programs can develop the self-reliance necessary among rural people for accelerated development." (Lele, 1975)

A Development Alternatives Inc. (DAI) evaluation of 36 projects measured success in terms of a cost-benefit analysis. The primary finding of the study was that in order to maximize the chances for project success, the small farmer should be included in the decision-making process -- particularly in the implementation stages -- and should also be persuaded to make a resource commitment to the project (Sommer, 1977: 87) Evaluators touted participation as a panacea for ensuring successful development projects.

Naturally donors want to have success stories to their credit. The discovery of the importance of participation prompted AID to encourage participatory processes in the development projects they supported. Proposals that demonstrated participatory practices, that involved the poor, and which considered the equitable distribution of benefits were favoured. As discussed earlier, there are a range of activities and meanings used to describe participation.

In a project in Kenya, WEI field workers worked with community members (religious leaders) who were somewhat more educated than their counterparts. WEI chose these leaders as it took less time and effort to

communicate with them. The project had the reputation of being highly participatory, but in reality, participation was only limited to those people who were more vocal and aware, and did not include the minority groups needing perhaps the most attention. Instead of promoting base group participation, the project only reinforced the existing traditional power structure, and provided little opportunity for the less educated, but often more aware villagers, to contribute their knowledge, and voice their needs.

Working with acknowledged leaders may be the only way to initiate contact with particular community, where the traditional power structure is very strong. The project may be successful in that a service that did not exist before, such as access to credit, is now available to the villagers. But this does not necessarily mean the acute needs of the community were met -- seedlings and technical advice may have contributed more to the future development of the community. Development as a process of increasing people's capacity to determine their future means that people need to be included in the process -- they need to participate (Bryant and White, 1983: 205).

6. Proof of participation

How is it possible for PVOs to get away with projects that are not as participatory as they claim? The answer is very simple. AID does not formally verify to what extent the PVOs' projects are participatory. PVOs are funded because supposedly they reach the poorest of the poor, are process oriented, and are participatory. AID does not closely question the intentions and practices of PVOs regarding participation.

I suggest that AID is not particularly interested in evaluating for participation for two interrelated reasons. First, it looks good, politically, for AID to be funding organizations and projects that are thought to be participatory. AID is therefore reluctant to discover a project is not participatory, because that could damage the egalitarian reputation it hopes to promote as a donor. Second, AID may be not really want to encourage the participation of grassroots organizations, as this could be threatening to the power structure. Finally AID may not care about participation, as long as the projects are successful in relation to its political and strategic goals.

Evaluation Criteria

Donors have no trouble when it comes to evaluating whether projects are cost effective, if management practices are suitable or if the project organizers are financially accountable. Criteria for assessing cost effectiveness or productivity for instance, are readily available -- number of houses produced per grant dollar, or acres of grain harvested per irrigation channel constructed -- and are more easily quantifiable than participation indicators. Participation may be a difficult concept to measure. It deals with hidden and overt power relations, with minority representation and traditional leadership roles, with increased levels of awareness and comprehension, but it is not impossible to devise objective criteria for evaluation.

Along the lines of my initial questioning, I asked field officers and other staff members at the PVOs how they would assess the participatory nature of a project, fully expecting them to disregard this possibility, based on the initial dismissal of participation. Yet again I was

surprised. It was difficult for most respondents, yet almost every one was able to describe some kind of methodology they would use to evaluate for participation. This supported my finding that PVOs still insist on the value of participatory approaches, despite the cynicism over the ambiguity in meaning.

Evaluation techniques suggested by the respondents PVOs and donor responses include: attending community meetings and observing the group dynamics. Others suggested open ended interviews with leaders, beneficiaries, women, people excluded from the project, and those who had left the project. Other indicators of participation, suggested were examining the composition of management boards or community councils. For instance, if 40% of the members of a cooperative were landless, then 40% of the people on the administrative board should be from that group. If a certain region supports rice, sorghum and maize growers, then these groups should be proportionately represented in the village development council of the area. Respondents suggested identifying key people involved in decision making, and which groups are excluded and why. Community involvement could be gauged by asking who takes part in the activities of the development project, and for what period. Others recommended counting the number of people in meetings or the number of people receiving credit for instance. Entrenchment of leadership and involvement of minorities are indicators of power relations which can inhibit or enhance community-wide participation. The length of a leader's time in office, and which groups participate in elections could proxy the degree of entrenchment of leaders.

It took me some time to realise that the methods described to me were the ideal evaluation situation for field representatives. In reality,

many staff members often only had one or two days to assess the impact and success of a development project. Obviously, to embark on the enlightening but time consuming and complicated techniques is impossible in such a short period of time. Respondents at the IAF in particular said they relied on their network of contacts to give feedback on the progress of the project and the problems and issues that confront the beneficiaries. If this is the case, then evaluating participation becomes a crucial issue, as the network of contacts will more than likely have a different perspective from the beneficiaries, and may convey a skewed impression to the field representatives.

To counteract this several PVOs are stressing the participatory evaluation of projects, where the beneficiaries themselves are involved in assessing the project, and not an outside evaluator. Although non-beneficiaries are often used to facilitate the evaluation process. OA is currently revising their evaluation process to specifically take participation into account. The program officers are devising a set of questions to address such issues as understanding of project impact, involvement of women and minorities in decision making, who participates in decision making at every stage of the process and on what basis project holders are selected. A participatory evaluation process was tested in Zambia, Zimbabwe and Tanzania, where local university trained people were selected to act as facilitators of the series of project evaluations. The group of facilitators, their supervisors, and beneficiary representatives held workshops where they gained immensely from the "learning process" based on the sharing of the results of the evaluation.

The American Council of Voluntary Agencies for Foreign Service (ACVAFS), now known as INTERACTION, is also explicitly concerned with the

ramifications of participation in development projects. In a recent publication, the "Evaluation Sourcebook for Private and Voluntary Organizations" three themes permeate the book -- "participatory", "systematic", and "simple methodologies" of evaluation. The publication stresses the importance of beneficiary participation in evaluation in that information becomes available depending on the communities schedule rather than that of an outside researcher. Several tools for evaluation are detailed including: action cards, community meetings, creative expression, diaries, farmer's own record, interviewing, investigative journalism, mapping, observation, photography, problem stories, and questionnaires. For every method participatory applications are detailed. For instance creative expression is thought to lend itself naturally to participation.

The process of using an art form for evaluation is actually more like a workshop than the administration of an evaluation instrument. The evaluator serves as a facilitator, establishing the focus for the art form, then guiding the participants in creating, and finally posing questions to aid in analysis and drawing conclusions. (ACVAFS, 1983:100)

Because of the complex social and political characteristics inherent in an evaluation of participation, the reasons for doing participation, the use of the results of evaluations, and the fact that many of the criteria used are ambiguous and judgemental. The results may likely not be received with much enthusiasm by donors, who need to justify where money is spent -- preferably on specific, measurable or visible activities.

The implication that AID does not stress the need to evaluate for participation is supported by the fact that AID does not have specific evaluation criteria for participation, despite the range of objective criteria that are applicable. This suggests to me that "participation"

really is only a "buzz word" and AID merely pays lip service to the idea.

A staff member of the central evaluation office of AID notes that:

"participation is seldom, if ever an explicit variable in project evaluation -- it is difficult to measure."

PVOs register on the fact that AID, and other donors, are not especially interested in checking whether projects are indeed participatory. This allows the PVOs to say that they are participatory, knowing full well they will not be asked to prove it. Claiming an organization is participatory is clearly beneficial -- it is good for the image of the organization, and permits it to garner support from private and government donors alike. As one respondent stated "who can be against the ideal of participation?"

The difficulty of proving the presence or absence of participation allows many organizations (donors and recipients alike) to pay lip service to the ideal of participation. PVOs true to the ideal of participation resent the fact that many organizations do not specifically promote participation, yet can successfully claim the contrary. Despite that moves are afoot to include participation as a theme in evaluations, some PVOs (and donors) realize that because of the undefined nature of participation and the reticence of measuring its presence and impact, it is possible to get away with being less than satisfactory on the participation front.

Questioning Participation.

One pattern that emerged in many interviews was that staff members were skeptical of the "fad" value of participation. As one field representative stated "it's something we've been doing for years, only we didn't call it participation." Another thought it "ludicrous when the

development field latches on to an idea -- participation is the basis on which our organization operates. We take it as a given." One group of PVOs were especially cynical, because donors were promoting a concept that they had used for a long time. One PVO staff person said "AID forced us to formalize a practice we've been doing since our inception. It's not exactly a revolutionary idea!" Another group of PVOs consciously started including beneficiaries in their development projects spurred on by donor emphasis on project success, thus reinforcing the popularity of the concept.

In a March, 1980 issue of Reports Magazine, a publication of World Education Inc., this contradiction is eloquently revealed. WEI is a PVO which, among other things, specializes in "providing professional assistance to planners of community-based programs who wish to use participatory approaches that center on the needs of adult learners." (Reports, 1980:1) In other words, one of the basic principles of the organization is the participation of community members in WEI's programs.

Yet three of the articles in this publication challenge the validity and applicability of participation, while other articles stress the success and suitability of participatory approaches. The challenging articles tackle three controversial issues. The first questions the validity of the assumption that participation enhances learning and community development. Levinger and Drahman break this key assumption into eight categories, and identify critical questions about them. The aim was to generate a checklist to be considered in designing non-formal education activities. The subsections include an examination of the following assumptions:

1. The poor and the less educated generally lack confidence in the ability to improve their own lives.

2. Participatory approaches lead to positive changes in the aspirations and expectations learners hold about their lives.
3. Participants (i.e. local people) are always best suited to identify their own needs.
4. If the use of participatory approaches were widespread, significant development changes would result.
5. Helping learners to develop skills such as the ability to clarify value positions, recognize cause and effect relationships, make considered judgements, and take responsibility for action, is as important as helping learners develop more concrete abilities in specific development sectors.
6. Participatory approaches help to broaden the decision-making base within a community.
7. Participatory approaches are suitable for most kinds of training situations.
8. Participatory approaches are culturally sensitive.

The authors conclude it is more important to be concerned with optimum participation rather than with maximum participation. WEI needs to consider what kind of participation is best for a particular group of learners in terms of their needs and cultural setting. Thus, while the eight assumptions identified are probably true some of the time, the authors seriously doubt the any is true all of the time (Levinger and Drahrman, 1980:7).

The second article "Rhetoric or Reality?" or "When does Participation become Manipulation?" examines the possibility that participatory techniques could allow educators to conceal their own shortcomings or biased aims. Marino cites the example where a group dynamics exercise can be used to relieve tensions and prepare a relaxed and friendly atmosphere so that the audience will then stoically and unprotestingly accept a traditional, directive lecture (Marino, 1980). This is yet another example of participation platitudes, where participation is claimed, and is actually counter-participatory.

The third article, "Participation: Do villagers really want it?"

wonders why participatory education programs lose support from the villagers who are supposed to be the participants. The article attributed this failure to two limiting factors: decision making on the village level is according to socio-political hierarchy, the elders make the major decisions, and the youth, the target of the project do not have much say; new ideas and practices tend to be considered foreign or alien and hence it is difficult to generate support. This example again emphasizes the crucial issue of working with the existing power structure, while trying to promote the participation of minorities, and other interest groups (Jurmo, 1980).

These articles were commissioned precisely because WEI recognized participation was "in" and wanted to question its understanding and use of the concept. I find this example revealing. If participation was fashionable, one would expect the PVO to adopt the approach as conventional wisdom. However, WEI had used participatory approaches since its inception, and ironically became skeptical of its applicability once the donors and a range of PVOs seemed to be supporting its promotion in vastly disparate circumstances and contexts.

Paul in his historical analysis of World Bank experience with community participation noted that the "indiscriminate promotion of CP (community participation) in all projects is certainly unwarranted." (Paul, 1986:41) He notes a few examples where projects were successful without participation:

In Mali where the society did not have a tradition of CP, forcing participation was deemed counter productive. In Northern Tunisia which has successful agricultural cooperatives, water users' associations have not attracted much attention. This is attributed to the fact that water is not very scarce, and hence the farmers are not interested in maintaining water courses under collective auspices. They are content to leave the task to the government agency which has always been responsible for it (Paul, 1986:28).

In these cases, the success of the project is judged in terms of the goal of the implementing agency, and not in terms of the beneficiaries. I believe some form of participation is possible in almost every type of project, even on the level of consciousness raising of the implications of the project for the community. I pursued this issue in the interviews.

A question the respondents found difficult to answer was which set of circumstances was not applicable for participation, and which tasks were more suited to participation than others. Most instinctively replied "participation is vital at all stages," and "the least level of participation we must ensure is that the beneficiaries understand the impact of the project on their lives." After probing, I found that some thought it was not possible to include every beneficiary in every stage of the development cycle, though all found it hard to imagine a project totally devoid of participation. Finsterbusch and Van Wicklin (1986) in their study of 52 AID funded projects, found that participation in the early stages of a project may not be a critical, while participation in implementation and maintenance is definitely more important for continued project success. The importance of participation increased over the life cycle of the project -- reflected in increasing importance of utilizing local skills and knowledge, the degree of ownership and control in the outputs of the project, and in the extent that community capacity has increased (Finsterbusch and Van Wicklin, 1986) This would imply little participation in designing the structure of a credit cooperative, with increasing participation in the administration and management of the coop over time, culminating in the complete independence of the project from PVO assistance.

Despite good intentions, PVOs do not have a very good track record of

stimulating the independence and self-reliance of the beneficiaries, and often remain the sole source of support of projects for many years. This phenomenon is discussed further in the following section.

Participation in technically sophisticated projects, e.g., the design and construction of an irrigation system, was often found to be inhibiting by the implementing agency, in cases where project organizers solicited village involvement from the beginning. Community input is more relevant for the efficient operations of the service than for the effective design of the scheme. (Paul, 1982) Some of those I interviewed suggested that the community did not understand the complexities of the system, and their involvement at that stage only slowed down the process. One respondent thought a highly participatory decision making process might inhibit the diffusion of necessary information to make vital management decisions. Those PVOs (and donors) who consider participation inhibiting and time consuming do not, I suggest, truly believe in participation.

Participation always slows down the process, but protagonists of participation (such as OA staff members) maintain the long term results justify the time taken. People are more committed to the project if they are involved in the decision making, and thus have some stake in the future of the project. Therefore one can not exclude participation on the grounds that it slows the process down.

Pathfinder Fund which provides family planning service in clinics, sees participation as vital in client feedback and response to the services provided, but not necessary in the initiation of the service and the selection of the staff to maintain the clinic. Is this true participation? I do not think so I believe it is vital that beneficiaries are included in a project in the initial stages, if only to gain an

understanding of the impacts and implications of the intervention. Family planning is a very delicate cultural and often political issue, which needs discussion and deliberation on the part of potential beneficiaries and implementors.

The profusion of definitions of participation initially confused me, until I realized this very ambiguity is functional. This fuzziness permits all parties to talk about participation in terms of the aims and activities that suit their own needs. The very fact that participation has so many meanings and implications allows donors and PVOs to mutually manipulate one another -- using the same jargon, with often entirely different meanings and motivations.

Therefore it is possible for PVOs to say they promote participation without ever having to be entirely explicit about what they mean. Because of the nature of the PVO-donor funding relationship, and host country influences, PVOs are obliged to focus on the particular desires of donors at particular point in time, which results in PVOs promoting participation, whether their projects were really participatory or not. Despite this dilemma over definition and application, PVOs still use participatory elements in their operations and promote the value of participation as an ideal. The next section investigates why PVOs, despite the denials, still incorporate participatory elements into their daily operation.

IV. CONTINUED INSISTENCE ON PARTICIPATION

In the face of conflicting goals and difficulties of implementation, why do PVOs still engage in participatory practices? Not everyone is manipulative and concerned merely for organizational survival. Participation is valued as a concept in its own right, which explains the recurring waves of revival in popularity. Bryant and White sum it up neatly by saying the "very process of development requires involvement by the people in shaping their future, and thus it is worth continuing to wrestle with the dilemmas that participation presents." (Bryant and White, 1982: 224)

Morals, Ideology, and Practice

For many PVOs, participation is part of the ideology of the organization -- one of the basic principles of operation.

"The philosophy of involving locals in designing projects that could meet their own needs comes from the founding objectives of our organization"

was one response. "We take participation as a given" was another. This is based on the belief that the beneficiaries have the right to decide on events and actions that affect their lives. Without participation the people may benefit but not develop from a project (Finsterbusch and Van Wicklin, 1986:1)

I asked PVO staff members whether they thought it might be possible to implement projects without participation. The strongest response I received was from an OA staff person, who said that "any social intervention without the approval of the community, even if it works, is not acceptable - it is a question of morality." This person had an

equally strong reaction to the ambiguous meaning of participation: he thought a new term should be invented to describe participation. He and his organization believe in the intrinsic value of beneficiary participation in initiation, design, implementation, and evaluation of projects and programs. Participation is an explicit criterion in project selection -- field officers assess the dynamics of community interaction, by noting which beneficiaries are most vocal in community meetings, and through observing how leaders interact with villagers (ordering them to do tasks versus working together with the villagers in assigning responsibility for instance). As discussed, participatory evaluation is promoted and supported by OA. For local intermediary organizations to qualify for funding and support from OA they must demonstrate a history of community service, and leaders must be accountable to the group in their relationship with the PVO or local government authorities. An interviewee cited the case where a village leader went to the local government office, to negotiate various water rights. He did so without consulting the community, and not surprisingly the rights awarded favoured access for the leader's clan. The fact that the leader was not accountable and responsible to the villagers made the PVO wary of funding the group for fear of reinforcing the unequal distribution of benefits.

Part of World Education Inc.'s charter is the participation of communities. "Group activities and discussions are used to assist adults to discover the resources that exist in their own neighborhoods and to use these to solve community problems." (WEI, March 1980) The PVO encourages and promotes participation of all groups in the community, from the children, to the youths, and especially the women. All the projects WEI supports, pay attention to community defined needs.

The Ministry of Education in Nepal commissioned WEI to draw up the National Literacy policy. Because the interaction was at the governmental-PVO level, the project might have not included community input. But WEI nevertheless made an effort to do so. Staff worked with villagers in a group process to find out themes of importance in their lives, and to gather the archetypal stories for inclusion in the educational materials. Different groups of villagers tested the materials, and their feedback was incorporated in the redesign. Even where the type of project and activity appears beyond the scope of community involvement, WEI remains committed to participation.

In other words, participation becomes institutionalized in the operations of the PVO, where it constitutes part of the moral code and ideological belief of the organization. The PVO uses participatory approaches regardless of the semantic debate over the meaning of participation.

I can explain the contradiction of the apparent dismissal of participation, yet the actual use of the approach, in that certain PVOs do not feel comfortable with the many connotations that participation has taken on. I suggest that each PVO has no problem with its own particular interpretation and use of participation, and does not even sense the contradiction. However, a PVO has great difficulty with the way in which other PVOs and the donors treat participation. PVOs almost wish to distance themselves from what participation has come to mean.

For example, Oxfam America might not want to be linked with the World Bank's conceptualization of participation as a cost effective tool. This is antithetical to OA's ideological beliefs. The sarcasm about participation is, I suspect, almost a defense mechanism. The PVO always

considers participation as an integral part of its approach to development, regardless of what the trends or themes are in the development field. To avoid the semantic confusion, OA for instance, chooses to term participation, "empowerment". This makes OA's meaning of democratic community control and self development distinct from "participation" used to justify reinforcing the elite structures in a village. Thus it is possible for the PVO to ridicule the confusion over the meanings of participation, while embodying participation in the fibre of the organization.

Independence and sustainability.

Presumably one of the reasons PVOs and other aid agencies are in the Third World is to help the poor mobilize themselves, through providing the skills, and materials to ensure future self-sufficiency and sustainability. The very goal of trying to create the conditions for sustainability implies that local people have to be involved in the project in more than just a token manner.

The Inter-American Foundation and other agencies, only give grants for three years. This is based on the hope that at the end of that time the group will be able to independently continue the project or program without any external assistance. In reality, this three year period has proven to be much too short to expect the community to gain the skills, and to generate the income required for sustainability. Time is insufficient to build the institutional and management skills needed for independent development. Despite IAF's policy to only fund for short periods of time, the organization more often than not renews grants for several more terms.

In Uruguay, an IPVO has received funding and support since its inception 15 years ago. OA also aims to give grants for short periods only, but would rather refinance a project, if, after the grant period was up, it was still not functioning as intended, than let the group go off and find another source of funding. This would break the continuity of the funding and may result in the IPVO chopping and changing approaches to suit the demands of different donors. OA might also jointly fund a project with another PVO with a similar development philosophy, and alternate grants. A person at the Pan American Development Fund (PADF) thought that one method to ensure sustainability is for local groups to learn how to tap the U.S. PVOs and local government organizations, and generate income in that manner. I would argue that this is not really sustainability, although it certainly is a survival mechanism.

What does this goal of sustainability mean for PVOs and participation? It creates a dilemma for PVOs -- PVOs promote sustainability, which if achieved, will put them out of business. Unfortunately, truly independently run and financed groups and projects are the exception rather than the rule. There are no incentives for PVOs or local groups to achieve this independence. PVOs often make themselves indispensable to the local groups, through funding, training, and support. There are no explicit criteria to evaluate the "sustainability" of projects. Proof of this independence would imply that the PVO has achieved its goal, and would oblige the PVO to leave.

If a project is successful, the last thing the PVO is motivated to do is pull out. Every organization likes to collect success stories. Instead of the project becoming independent, its very success mitigates against this, and actually can have the opposite affect. Sarvodaya, an

IPVO in Sri Lanka is the prime example of this. The organization is well respected, has a good reputation for being participatory, and has several well functioning projects to its credit. Not only is Sarvodaya supported by several international and local donors, but additional donors are almost clamouring to fund the organization. Thus, the three to five year cut off point for funding is more rhetoric than anything else. I suspect the rationale for deciding on the period of the grant is probably more a function of the budgeting requirements of the donor or PVO, than of a realistic assessment of the time needed for institution building.

Regardless of the period of the assistance, or the disincentives for PVOs to relinquish their involvement in projects and organizations, the basic intention of PVOs is to create the conditions whereby the village or community will continue in an independent manner. An example of where a PVO was actually able to provide the impetus, and then leave, was an innovative family planning project in Indonesia, funded by the Pathfinder Fund. A river boat was used a floating clinic, to reach the smaller water-bound communities, generally out of reach of the mainstream family planning program. The Ministry of Agriculture noted the success of the program in reaching rural communities and asked to share the boat to transport their extension officers to the outlying areas the clinic served. Eventually other ministries -- Population and Education, along with the Agriculture department provided support for the project. Pathfinder Fund was able to extricate itself after only two years. The project has gone from strength to strength: there are now 54 boats, one donated by the president himself, used by various ministries. The family planning project is now entirely run by local groups and the participation

of the villagers in the remote areas is an integral part of the program.

If PF had not encouraged the local villagers and the departments of Agriculture, Population and Education to participate in and eventually take over the family planning program, the project might still be depending on PF for support and funding. Instead the program is self-sustaining and is expanding its sphere of influence. PF showed tremendous strength in withdrawing when it did, instead of continuing to fund a successful project and have the name of the PVO associated with it. The participation of the beneficiaries and local institutions was key to the successful functioning of this project. PF would not have been able to withdraw funding without local support and involvement.

Participation: the vital ingredient

As mentioned earlier, participation is often a success factor in development projects. For example, the Tototo Home Industries (Kenya), an intermediary organization, was selected by WEI because of Tototo's belief in participation and that control by local people will bring about lasting change. WEI and Tototo place an emphasis on participation, for they feel projects will not work without it. In Bomani, a village approximately 100 miles from Mombassa, Tototo worked with a women's group belonging to a cooperative. The women wanted to start an income generating project. Tototo did not impose its ideas on the group, but worked together with the women, who eventually decided they wanted to establish a bakery. The team lead the women through a process which helped them identify for themselves the planning and administrative implications and resource needs of a bakery. Considerations included building the premises and installing the ovens, organizing work teams, and distributing the bread. The women

identified these tasks, and worked out solutions to deal with them.

If Tototo had simply suggested the bakery, with a set plan outlining the responsibilities of the women, the women would not have been as committed to the scheme, and it is unlikely the project would have succeeded. "...the initial group trust, active participation, and equity in decision making lead to continued momentum and benefits for the group" (Crone, 1981). The group then went on to plan other activities, to fulfill the demand from the members of Tototo for income generating opportunities. No matter if the PVOs are fluid about the understanding of participation, they often consider the participation of beneficiaries as a necessary ingredient for a project to be considered successful, or as a goal in itself.

Often organizations suggest their projects are participatory because the design of the programs are conceived around the idea of including beneficiaries as labour, working on a project for the benefit of the community. i.e. Merely contributing time and energy to a project supposedly constitutes participation. I do not believe this is true participation because the beneficiaries play no role in identifying their needs, nor in devising ways of addressing their problems. They are merely another economic factor of production, which might ultimately benefit from the outcome of the project.

A World Bank rural roads project in Mexico and Colombia, which paid much attention to participation and its ramifications, essentially considers participation of the beneficiaries as working (for wages) on the project. "Participation" in the road building by unskilled villagers, was induced through the payment of wages, payment in kind, and support

services. Other incentives included "benefits to the community of having an improved road in the future." Does simply joining a work team to build a road for one's community constitute participation? This is certainly not participation in terms of decision making. The community played no part in choosing the alignment of the road and the selection of participants. If they had been included in the initial conception and design of the roads, the chances are the location and access of the road would have suited the needs of the villagers more closely, and thus the workers may have worked faster on the construction because of a greater commitment to the project. Participation of the villagers is obviously an essential input for the Bank project, yet participation is only really thought of as inputs of time and labour on the part of the community. The issue becomes whether the project in which the people are participating answers a community defined need, and a community devised solution.

Living with the results.

One of the observations that struck me from the interviews was that even though the goal of most PVOs is to stimulate local development and ultimately independence from aid -- the achievement of sustainability and independence does not mean that the PVO will no longer work in the area. On the contrary, PVOs hope that the projects are successful and a role model for other communities. If the communities are not involved in the projects, or if the projects are unsatisfactory, it is unlikely that the beneficiaries would recommend the PVO or the project to other groups. As one person said, "we have to live with the results of our projects, its not as if we pull out never to return to the country again."

Part of the explanation is that PVOs are in close contact with their

recipients: representatives travel extensively in the field, and often PVOs have regional offices in the host countries. The closer the organization is to seeing the impact of the funding, the more certain the organization has to be of the suitability of its methods and approaches. AID on the other hand funds small scale community projects via several layers of organizations, i.e. PVOs and other intermediary organizations, and seldom directly sees the impact of its intervention. AID does see the results of its directly funded, large scale projects -- evaluations are required. The size of the projects makes the feedback harder to ignore, and therefore AID pays more attention to these inter-governmental projects, than to the smaller scale projects it funds indirectly. This implies AID can almost take less responsibility for the PVO implemented projects, and therefore is not really that concerned with impact.

ACCION AITEC, a PVO which provides technical assistance, runs solidarios group credit schemes all over Latin America. The model is based on the idea of lending to group, instead of an individual, with the group as a whole taking responsibility for repaying the loan. Group members are therefore obligated to one another. The loans are very small, and are primarily for self-employed informal sector workers. Therefore the borrowers need a credit scheme which is responsive to their identified needs in terms of small loan amounts, interest rates and repayment schedules.

Participation in these solidarity groups is very interesting. It is "structured" participation, in the sense that each group is constituted and run along the same lines. ACCION requires that borrowers form their own groups in order to qualify for a joint loan. This may appear almost forcing an association, and limiting choice. ACCION does not see it in

this way -- the style of participation may be mandated, but borrowers are not inhibited in choosing the activities in which they wish to engage. The solidarity groups form foci in which participants identify their own needs and work together with their co-borrowers in devising solutions to their problems.

If the revolving loan scheme did not suit the needs of the borrowers the program would not be able to attract any other participants and the model would not be successful. Hence, other organizations would not require the services of ACCION. If the projects failed, or were detrimental to the beneficiaries, the image of the PVO could be damaged, and it may not be able to work in the area again. This might be the case in the CRS/Caritas example, with the minimum employment program (PEM). I suspect the Chileans groups opposing PEM would be reluctant to work with CRS again after its rather unsatisfactory track record.

It is important for PVOs to get feedback from recipients, to establish how the project is working and if the beneficiaries' defined needs are being met. PVOs need to ensure the meaningful participation of beneficiaries; if they do not the image of the organizations could be impaired.

What are the implications of the ambiguous understanding of participation, of the donor-PVO relationship, and the issue of the evaluation of participation? What does it mean for the participation of beneficiaries and for the functioning of PVOs? The concluding section considers these issues.

V. CONCLUSION

Implications and Impacts

The dilemmas of participation are essentially irreducible. PVOs are cynical about participation, yet they still subscribe to the practice and believe in the concept. Participation is a complex issue, balanced by a series of pros and cons. The striving for meaningful participation is valuable -- it leads to better project design and ensures felt needs are met; it promotes commitment and support for projects; it builds on indigenous knowledge; it increases awareness, capability and promotes sustainability; and it acts as a catalyst for encouraging future development. However, participation is difficult to implement -- many forces militate against its adoption, i.e. donor requirements, host country demands, efficiency criteria and conflicting motives. It can reinforce existing inequalities instead of promoting even development. It slows down the project process, but the results are supposedly worthwhile. It is no wonder that the interpretation and use of participation is ambiguous in the light of these counteracting forces.

Why is it that no single definition has been formed to categorically describe participation? As shown earlier, it is possible to devise objective criteria to evaluate for participation, and definitions could be combined to arrive at a universal understanding. This has not happened. I suggest that this is so because it serves the needs of the PVOs and donors alike. Each organization uses a definition of participation to suits its objective in a particular context. It is functional for PVOs and donors to have this fuzzy definition of participation. This ambiguity does not work to the advantage of PVOs and their beneficiaries all of the

time.

What are the implications for participation and PVOs of this the ambiguity of participation, and desire to promote participation in the face of the difficulties of implementation? First, because the meanings and interpretation of participation are so fuzzy, PVOs and donors alike find it possible to claim they support participatory practices, when indeed they may not. The good image of the organization remains intact, because everyone has a personal interpretation of participation. This is reinforced by the fact that PVOs are seldom, if ever, called upon to prove or disprove the claim. Participation may simply be a platitude, a justification for activities that are far from democratic and that do not meaningfully involve the beneficiaries in decision making. The Guatemalan "self-help" housing project is the prime example -- those in authority claimed the project was participatory, but in reality the community involvement was coerced.

The second important implication of the contradiction flows directly from the nature of the donor-PVO relationship and the flexible interpretation of participation. A PVO can manipulate and reinterpret the meaning of participation in terms of which the donors approve, while not actually changing its participatory processes used in the projects. The case where WEI rewrote the non-formal education proposal in terms of supporting privatization, without really changing the project design, is an example of this. Because participation means something different to every group or organization, merely couching participation in ways donors wish to hear, allows PVOs to carry on their participatory activities unhindered, and does not make much difference to the PVO's initial goals

and actions.

Another outcome of the participation paradox is a function of donor requirements indirectly associated with participation. For instance, where PVOs are forced to change their approach to suit available funding instead of pursuing the needs and priorities of beneficiaries, participation can be inhibited and limited. PVOs are obliged to change the nature of participation in order to secure funding and support. Literacy is no longer attracting much support from donors, even though many of WEI's beneficiaries identify this as a priority. Therefore WEI has to secure funding for other activities, such as income generating projects, or micro enterprise schemes and include literacy under the cover of these other projects. i.e., WEI intermediary groups could be limited in the types of projects they can pursue.

By PVOs not being rigorous about their understanding of participation, and not exploring the power relations in villages they could actually inhibit the participation of minority groups. The starting point of projects is often via setting up communications with established community leaders, who are easy to identify, and who are presumably familiar with the needs and problems of the community. However, the villagers may be unsatisfied with the role the leaders take and the PVOs simply could reinforce the inequitable power structure, instead of encouraging grass roots development. In Tanzania, the intermediary organization worked through the village leaders for the distribution of the goats, assuming the leaders had the interests of their constituents at heart. Unfortunately this was not so. The PVO representatives should have taken more time to assess the power relations in the village, and perhaps devised another mechanism for distributing the goats among the

villagers.

The ambiguity of the meaning of participation therefore is not merely a semantic debate but reinforces the difficulties of implementing participation which affects the way in which PVOs operate, and obviously affects the participation of beneficiaries.

Integrity and Compromise

Finally, an issue that intrigues me, from a personal and professional perspective, is how do the PVOs and the individual staff members retain their integrity, how do they rationalize their actions in the face of the conflicting forces pulling them in different directions? How do they cope with the dilemmas of participation? Do they feel that they are completely coopted, or do they feel that even despite the restrictions and caveats placed on their work, they are still able to something of value? Presumably they do or else they would not be doing the work they do.

One group of people, did not use participation to describe their activities. Some OA staff members, for instance, thought empowerment was a better description, as it embodied a notion of community control and power over decision making and allocation of resources "rather than the meaningless participation which can be used to describe anything."

PVOs justified their flexible interpretations of participation based on alternative strategies in different circumstances. One explanation is that PVOs consider participation an important enough a concept or value that they make sure it occurs in all the activities PVOs are engaged. When PVOs concentrated on providing relief, it was easy for PVOs to think of participation of the poor as receiving a share of the relief materials. But as strategies and thinking changed and improved in sophistication, so

did the ramifications of participation. Participation came to include the inclusion of beneficiaries in increasingly more power positions. Whether it is agricultural cooperatives or the provision of improved water services, PVOs at the very least make sure the beneficiaries understand the implications of the project, both immediately and in the future. Participation becomes important in different circumstances from the base level up.

Several PVOs felt they could work in any context, on the grounds that, as organizations, they were apolitical. George Kraus, the former Regional Program Officer for Latin America for CARE USA, stated:

"I did not support Pinochet's philosophy in Chile, or that of the generals in La Paz, Bolivia, but CARE can do its work on technical grounds -- e.g., water projects -- and work in any type of regime for the long-range good of the people."
(Smith:1982)

Remaining apolitical, I believe is contentious in this context. Taking government funds is a political act, as donor support is seldom unconditional.

What remains for this study is to get a first hand field perspective of what beneficiary participation means in development projects. I need to translate the interpretations of PVO and donor representatives into the reality of project experience. I suspect in the field, the cynicism will not be not apparent, for beneficiaries believe and demand they have an important role to play. Investigating for myself the direct impact and value of participation, and the problems associated with its implementation would allow me to balance the rhetorical perspective held in the United States.

APPENDIX 1.

List of Interviewees

PRIVATE VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATIONS.

Oxfam America

Bob Snow	Research and Planning Officer, Overseas Department
Jethro Pettit	Acting Project Officer for Latin America and the Caribbean
Joel Charney	Area Coordinator for Latin America and Asia
Leslie Tuttle	Former Projects Communications Officer

ACCION AITEC

Jeffrey Ashe	Senior Associate Director
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World Education Inc.

Jeanne McCormack	Project Officer Africa
John Cummings	Project Officer Asia
David Eddy	Project Officer

Pathfinder Fund

Bonnie Shepard	Senior Assistant for Women's Issues
Maryann Burkhard	Deputy Director of Technical Services and Planning, Director of Evaluation

Pan American Development Fund

Phoebe	Field Officer for Latin America and the Caribbean
Lansdowne	

Save the Children Federation

Jairo Arboleda	Director Latin America and the Caribbean
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Private Agencies Collaborating Together (PACT)

Daniel Santo Pietro	
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DONORS

U.S. AID

Judith Gilmore	Chief, Evaluation Unit, Office of Program, Policy and Evaluation, Bureau of Food for Peace and Voluntary Assistance.
Lou Stanberg	Deputy Director, Office of Program, Policy and Evaluation
Rhodina McIntosh	Chief of Information Division, Bureau of Food for Peace and Voluntary Assistance
Ross Bigelow	Department Chief, Employment and Enterprise Development, Office of Rural and Institutional Development, Bureau for Science and Technology
Nena Vreeland	Program Analyst, Centre for Development Information and Evaluation, Bureau for Program and Policy Coordination

Margaret Sarles Rural Development Specialist, Office of
Agricultural and Rural Development, Bureau for
Latin America and the Caribbean
Paul Maguire Director, Private and Voluntary Organizations,
Office of Development Programming, Bureau for
Latin America and the Caribbean
Janice Weber Coordinator for Latin America and the
Caribbean , Bureau for Program and Policy
Coordination

World Bank

Cynthia Cook Sociologist, Rural Transportation Services,
Transportation Department
Charlotte Program Officer, Bolivia and Ecuador
Jones-Carroll
Michael Economic Research Institute
Bamberger

Inter-American Foundation

Charlie Reilly Director, Office of Program Learning and Dissemination
Kevin Healy Foundation Representative for Bolivia
Steven Vetter Program Director of Program Management
Cindy Ferrin Foundation Representative for Uruguay
Carol Michaels- Senior Foundation Rep for Mexico.
O'Laughlin

ACADEMICS

Harvard Insitute for International Development

Mary Anderson Research Associate - International Relief/Development
Study (Harvard Graduate School of Education)

Johns Hopkins University

Grace Goodell Director, Program on Social Change and Development,
Associate Professor of Anthropology, School of Advanced
International Studies

Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Martin Diskin Professor, Department of Anthopology
Warren Van Doctoral Candidate - Department of Political Science
Wicklin

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